

**Crackdowns in Malaysia, Turkey mark end of 'successful Muslim democracies', says daily Malaysian Insider
March 8, 2016**

Malaysia and Turkey, once hailed as "successful, secular democracies" among Muslim nations, are now failing as authorities crack down on journalists and stifle press freedom, the Sydney Morning Herald comments in an editorial today.

"Both Turkey's Erdogan and Malaysia's Najib have been following the universal handbook for strongman leaders in trouble – they are protecting their own power," said the paper, referring to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"And perhaps the biggest single impulse to censorship has been the effort to silence allegations of personal corruption at the very top."

Last week, Turkish authorities seized control of a newspaper in a widening crackdown against supporters of Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, a staunch critic of Erdogan.

Zaman, Turkey's top-selling newspaper, was taken over by the state, in what Ankara claimed was part of an investigation into illicit financing of a "Gülenist terror group".

This followed arrests of 52 people linked with Erdogan's AKP ruling party, over a money-laundering scheme, with Turkish police discovering millions of dollars in cash allegedly used to pay bribes.

An audio clip was later posted on YouTube, in which Erdogan was heard telling his son to get rid of tens of millions of dollars, but the Turkish leader said it was orchestrated by the US-based Gulen.

SMH compares the media clampdown in Turkey with the blocking of The Malaysian Insider news site by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission over a report that cited a source as saying that corruption charges had been recommended against Najib over some RM2.6 billion found in his personal bank accounts.

It said the developments in both countries "will put democracies in the Islamic world on the list of endangered species".

"And they are sliding. In the past 10 days, the governments in both countries shut down media outlets that dared report unflattering facts about their leaders."

The daily quoted an expert from the Australian National University (ANU) as saying that Malaysia's slide towards authoritarianism had begun since the rule of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, after he sacked his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in 1998.

"It's been sliding to authoritarianism for some time and now it's coming to a head," said Amin Saikal of ANU's Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies.

"Turkey was more successful than Malaysia."

Saikal said although the Arab spring brought about democracies in some Muslim countries, it was Indonesia which had been more successful. – March 8, 2016.

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